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Book Review: Leadership – Touching Lives

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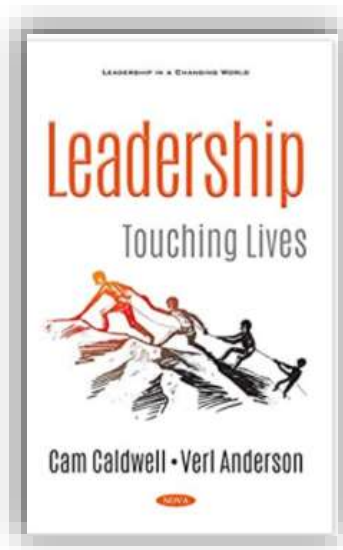
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Leadership – Touching Lives

Authors: Cam Caldwell and Verl Anderson

Reviewer: Elizabeth Gingerich, *JVBL Editor-in-Chief*

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Problem Identified and Message Defined

Beginning with an alarming Gallup poll finding that the majority of employees worldwide are self-described as “actively disengaged” from their respective employing entities – an indicator that change in leadership styles is critical for the proper protection of organizational interests and objectives – authors Cam Caldwell and Verl Anderson set forth in *Leadership – Touching Lives* to explore the reasons behind this separation between worker and workplace and to provide ways to remediate this troubling situation.

Both positive and negative elements of leadership and of particular persons in position of authority – either currently or in the past – are discussed and real-world examples are provided throughout the book.

At the outset, the authors underline the importance of leadership, describing it as a one of a “personal relationship” – where trust is generated and care for others is genuine. The ultimate goal of effective leadership is to communicate a common purpose to inspire both the leader and the follower in order for all to be the best versions of themselves as possible. Leaders must be authentic and ethical in their actions and beliefs. They must identify their own personal values and align their actions in accordance thereof. They must serve as role models, and hopefully incentivize those who are led into following the same course. It is this translation of goals into reality that ultimately earns followership and desired emulation.

How-To's

In closing the gap between the message, the messenger, and the recipient, there are common practices explained that the aspiring leader should follow. First, the person in the position of authority must identify organizational goals and if they are contrary to her/his personal ethics, engage in discourse to challenge the process and better structure the message. Next, the aspirant must understand the reason underlying each organizational goal, communicating its context thoroughly and clearly to the follower. But having this alignment will not necessarily produce the synergy necessary to impact outcomes; a sufficient level of motivation and the required resources must be supplied to all participants in order to effect positive outcomes.

Commitment to others' welfare is integral to the process of directing people's acts and influencing their way of thinking. The authors demarcate a pathway of achieving this. Individual chapters follow particular topics as ways to produce effective leaders and to motivate and inspire followers. For example, the leader portrayed as "ethical steward" is explored and examples provided. In discussing principled leadership, the authors use the founder of Chick-fil-A, S. Truett Cathy, as a prototype of ethical stewardship. As per the reviewer's understanding, however, Cathy generated substantial public criticism with his fundamentalist beliefs, primarily due to his religious tenets – especially with respect to his stance on same-sex marriage by upholding the traditional definition. His adherence to his self-defined principles alienated many in the LGBTQ community, provoking restaurant boycotting and leading communities to ban together to prevent local extensions of the franchise. Thus, the reader must consider the propriety and relativity of one's own religious tenets when projecting them upon the workforce or community.

Eschewing Self Interest to Embrace the Common Good

A primary theme established in this book concerns the need to treat each worker/follower with respect – to refrain from viewing them as a means to an end thereby potentially relegating them to commodity status. The chasm created when leadership strategies are myopically fixated upon short-term financial goals is that the relationship between superior and subordinate is sabotaged; trust is eroded and respect quickly dissipates. Rather, the leader must forego the pursuit of self-interest goals and rather focus upon earning the trust and commitment of others by demonstrating authentic care and concern about each of the followers that s/he directs. Indeed, through this personal valuation inevitably comes a dedication to better work performance. And where leaders fail to meet established standards, a further indication of their authenticity is produced by being transparent and accountable for such failures. This is why leader self-assessment is so imperative in order to successfully allay concerns of disjointed goals and performance measures; the leader must continuously recalibrate her/himself and consistently adjust leadership traits to be in conformity with the highest principled standards. When self-glorification, power, and financial advancement become the mainstay, trust and respect are vanquished.

Leading Change

Leading change is another theme explored in the book as authentic leaders do not cower from changing business practices to accommodate societal needs and to introduce better ways of advancing a product or service. True leaders must continuously discover better ways of achieving a collective goal. If revisions to a business paradigm are legitimately mandated, the leader must guide this revisionary process in a manner that does not alienate the worker, but incorporates her/him into the reformative and decision-making process – working as a single collective and motivated unit. Former Kimberly-Clark CEO Darwin Smith is an example of leadership in this vein; Smith was used to show how proper management of change can be achieved when he set out on a risky venture to deviate from "business as usual" by electing to sell the company's paper mills and to venture into a much more diverse product line. This was a then-decried move which, over time, propelled the company into a better competitive position in the market.

Employee Vestment

Successful relationship-building helps vest the employee, making her/him part of the team – an integral component in the overall success of the organization. The sense of an expansive sense of ownership and a working partnership between all the workers – managers and employees alike – strengthens the collective commitment to furthering the company's objectives.

Integrity as a Driving Force

If a principal lacks integrity, trust will inevitably be nonexistent, for whenever a person in the position of authority outwardly lacks integrity and courage of conviction, her or his believability and credibility are compromised. Thus, it is imperative – as the authors opine – that each leader remain true to her/his ideals and ethical guidelines in order to produce a lasting and meaningful relationship with followers. In this manner, moral self-governance is essential to safeguarding the leader-follower relationship. Integrity fails where one self-misrepresents or deviates from established moral behavior; hence, an adherence to truth is mandated at all times. One example used to demonstrate the importance of integrity was founder and executive chairman of global manufacturer Huntsman Corporation, Jon Huntsman, Sr., who famously decried the notion of variable country ethical standards. He rather emphasized that the true measure of success lies not in the material acquisition for oneself, but in what the leader gives back to society.

Integrity also is buttressed by a lifetime of learning and where need be, self-adjustment.

The Value of Kindness

After an American presidential term marked by family member separation policies, immigration bans premised on a person's declared faith, deregulation of environmental protections, and a contentious 2020 election cycle, a prominent theme today is the restoration and practice of simple kindness – respect for human life, adherence to dignity, and a focus on everyone's personal worth. This attribute defines one's world view and shapes the treatment of others. The practice of kindness assumes a level of sensitivity and empathy necessary to comprehend the struggles and challenges faced by others and presupposes the outcome that kindness empirically leads to greater creativity and innovation. Kindness is heralded by the authors as a trait which ultimately furthers an organization's goals and purposes. It is kindness which distinguishes genuine leadership from a superior's bare wielding of authority.

Service to Others

Volunteerism connotes self-giving and dedication to others reveals a sense of communal purpose. It is this outwardly service which engenders personal happiness and promotes human health – essential to valuing others and eschewing personal greed. A commonly shared commitment to producing something of value to society at large is a message that is shared and lived by leader and follower alike as the betterment of all of society rests with concerted action and focus. Deviation from this norm can, and often does, lead to consequences that include the imposition of monetary fines, loss of employment, and

potential global recession. The authors intimate without specifically naming him that John Paulson, Wall Street tycoon and proprietor of a recognized failed financial instrument, exemplified self-service and the extreme lack of generosity, practices which eventually culminated in the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

Feminine Leadership

Common female leadership characteristics – or what this reviewer has previously termed the “Eve Factor” – outlines identifiable common leadership traits without engaging in gender prototyping. The proclivity to work in tandem with others, to give credit to the group rather to self, to readily admit mistakes and be accountable, to espouse ethics of caring, and to embrace diversity represent several of the noted characteristics of the female leader. Florence Nightingale was selected by the authors as a pillar of societal service in her relentless dedication to reforming healthcare in England. Other traits emphasized include the proper establishment of a life-work balance as well as the practice of listening to others as opposed to simply telling subordinates what must get done. Teamwork and collaboration are imperative in this discussion.

Stakeholder Responsibility

In conformity with America’s recent business roundtable discussion where the elements of the triple-bottom-line paradigm were notably adopted, the authors devote a section of their discussion to the leader’s dedication to the betterment of society in general. For it is through a sense of social responsibility that the worker is uplifted and joins in the collective goals of doing one’s best for the betterment of the planet. The Friedman way of focusing on financial profits for shareholders as the sole purpose of the corporation has been set aside for the wider stakeholder interest inclusion. Bengali social entrepreneur and founder of Grameen Bank, Muhammad Yunus, was chosen to epitomize the leader who exceeds basic company goals to, in his case, tackle poverty through making microloans – a practice which continues throughout the world today.

Leaders-in-Training

Lastly, the authors explore the notion that decision relegation, employee training and mentoring, and equipping subordinates all serve to produce the next line of principled leaders. Showing by example, allowing the employee to mimic the act, and then providing sound and honest feedback are all necessary to continue the process of creating and maintaining principled leaders. This treatment of the subordinate as a cherished colleague creates similarity of purpose and an ongoing chain of effective leadership – a model entrusted to our organizational heads to enthusiastically adopt and implement without hesitation.

Totality of Characteristics

My hat’s off to authors Caldwell and Anderson in their thorough exploration of principled leadership through the vehicle of relationship-building. On a personal note, I could not help but think of another titan of industry and personal mentor – Ray C. Anderson – as one who completely filled this bill. Anderson, founder and former CEO of Atlanta-based Interface Flor,

– the world’s largest commercial carpeting manufacturer – exemplified dedication to truth and integrity, was an agent of change, committed himself and his company to team involvement, and incorporated followers into a shared and heightened sense of planetary purpose. In his own book, “Mid-Course Correction” these ideals were fully exemplified. Anderson saw what the petrochemicals used in his products were doing to the planet and engaged in a total restructuring of the corporate business paradigm, making him one of the first global business leaders to engage in resource protection, to embrace the triple-bottom-line approach in business dealings, and to take his followers along for the world betterment ride through acts of inspiration and personally living the model he professed.

— Elizabeth F. R. Gingerich, Editor-in-Chief, JVBL